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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003657

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND KUWAITI PM REVIEW BILATERAL TIES,  
WITH FOCUS ON DIFFERING APPROACHES TO COUNTER TERROR

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: In an October 25 call on the Prime Minister, the Ambassador reviewed the main elements of the bilateral relationship. The Ambassador thanked the PM for Kuwait's steady cooperation on security matters and generous support for coalition efforts in Iraq, including provision of fuel for OIF and termination of the ban on third country national drivers going into Iraq. Ambassador noted our intention to work jointly with the Kuwaiti government to move toward a free trade agreement. In the only extended exchange during the forty minute conversation, the Ambassador raised counterterrorism as a problem area in the bilateral relationship, citing the differences between the U.S. and Kuwaiti approaches. Shaykh Sabah said the U.S. can count on Kuwait's continued support and the GOK welcomed economic cooperation. On counterterrorism, the Prime Minister maintained that the GOK approach is successful and Kuwait will not suffer the attacks seen in neighboring countries. (End Summary)

Appreciation for Support

2. (C) In his initial call on Kuwaiti Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Ambassador LeBaron thanked Kuwait for its strong and continued support to U.S. security operations and OIF, noting the GOK decisions to continue to supply free fuel until the end of the year and not to enforce a ban on travel to Iraq of third country national convey drivers. He stressed U.S. appreciation for the political risks Kuwait has taken in support of U.S. interests and noted that as a result of GOK efforts, the U.S.-GOK partnership is stronger than ever.

Economic Ties Need Strengthening

3. (SBU) The Ambassador stated that the removal of the threat of Saddam Hussein opened the door in Kuwait for focus on the future and to advance economic ties. Noting that he had just come from a meeting with the Minister of Trade and Commerce, the Ambassador said that he was prepared to work with the GOK in a sustained way on the steps necessary to advance the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement and eventually move to a Free Trade Agreement.

Kuwait Is Not Immune to A Terror Attack

4. (C) The Ambassador raised counterterrorism as an area in need of greater collaboration. He noted some improvements in the flow of information from the Kuwaiti security services, but cautioned that the disconnect between the U.S. and GOK approaches to fighting terrorism should not be allowed to become a bigger problem in the bilateral relationship. He reiterated the U.S. is not convinced that the Kuwaiti approach of attempting to co-opt jihadis through family, tribal, or social networks was effective. Arresting, jailing, and using force as needed characterize the main elements of the U.S. approach. The Ambassador further noted our deep concern about the potential for terrorist acts in Kuwait when hardened, experienced, and dangerous jihadis return home from Iraq. The Ambassador told the PM the bilateral counterterrorism dialogue needs to occur at all levels: intelligence, security, and political.

GOK-U.S. Friendship Knows No Limits

5. (C) Shaykh Sabah agreed that relations are on solid footing and asserted there are no limits to GOK support of and friendship to the U.S. Commenting on the fuel agreement, he said the contract was a necessary way to avoid any embarrassment to his government or the U.S. Parliament needs to see an agreement and understand its conditions. He anticipated parliamentary approval of the supply of fuel through December, but was skeptical a future agreement with the same terms and conditions would pass muster. He did, however, predict an FTA would sail through Parliament. The PM was also certain (95% sure) legislation would pass in the current session of National Assembly giving women the right to vote and run for public office.

## The PM on Terrorism

16. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's remarks on counterterrorism, Shaykh Sabah emphasized that security is also a priority for the GOK. He noted that except for the 2002 Failaka shooting of U.S. Marines and the 2003 Camp Doha attack by a "lunatic," there has been no serious terror incident in Kuwait and, "God willing," nothing will happen. He believed most Kuwaitis who fought in Iraq were killed there and those who returned to Kuwait were promptly detained and interrogated by security forces. He claimed that Kuwait is in control of its borders and Kuwaiti jihadis entered Iraq from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Syria. He accused fringe elements of influencing Arab youth and had special criticism for Al Jazeera. Fortunately, according to the PM, Kuwaitis were not as easily influenced as their neighbors. Shaykh Sabah said Kuwait wanted to be a peaceful oasis and, to that end, was committed to the Arab and recent GCC agreements against terrorism. He added Kuwait would not tolerate any attack against U.S. interests.

## Trip to the Orient

17. (C) Commenting on his July trip to Asia, the PM said Hong Kong and Singapore were models of port and airport management that Kuwait hoped to copy. When asked if there were elements of the Singaporean political model with applicability to Kuwait, the PM said he was impressed with Singapore's approach to fighting corruption.

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